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# Didactic and Fiction Through the Paratext in Amos Tutuola's The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town

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**ABSTRACT:** Didactic and fiction through the paratext in Amos Tutuola's writing is the main concern of this study. Its objective is to show how Amos Tutuola resorts to didactic and fiction in using the paratext to describe and display his imaginative universe of *The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town*. As for approaches, didacticism and literary approaches are of great help to achieve this study. It results that, through the paratext, Tutuola teaches his fictional universe to readers. He largely succeeds to use the didactical dimension in presenting first: "The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town" as the title of the novel to help readers imagine in advance its content. Then, subtitles as elements of paratext are also used so as to identify, describe, design, and connote his fictional world. In brief, Tutuola shows his didactic talents through the title and the subtitles of this novel to attract people learn the multifarious realities of his imaginative world.

**Key-words:** Didactic, Paratext, teaches, Witch-Herbalist, Remote-Town

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## I. Introduction

Teachers in primary and secondary schools as well as teachers of university use didactic as the art or science of teaching, to teach different disciplines of their different domains to learners. With teaching strategies as part of didactic, titles and subtitles of books are also highly regarded by teachers. They resort to didactic because it bears teaching strategies for each discipline. In literature, writers also use didactic to teach their imaginative world, mainly with regard to moral direction. In this respect, views on didactic, fiction or literature and paratext can be profitable for this study. As for didactic, *Didactic Examples in Literature* (online) illustrate:

The word didactic means instructive. Speaking, writing or showing someone how to do something is didactic. Didacticism is defined as the type of literature that is meant to instruct or teach something. Textbooks are, of course, didactic, as are recipe books, fables, parables, and instructional manuals. George Orwell's novella *Animal Farm* can be categorized as an example of didactic literature.

In this famous tale, Orwell uses animal characters in order to represent leaders during the Russian Communist Revolution. And, *Didactic Examples in Literature* (online) adds that: "Didacticism is all about teaching and educating and (...) the term didacticism, when referring to writing, describes literature serving as a means to teach the reader something, whether that be morals or how to make stew".

As far as fiction is concerned, the *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* defines fiction as a: "Literary type using invented or imaginative writing, instead of real facts, usually written as prose".

As for paratext, Gérard Genette (1996, P. 40) defines paratext as: "those things in a published work that accompany the text, things such as the author's names, the title, preface or introduction, or illustrations".

Amos Tutuola uses one the best elements of literature, the "paratext" to teach his fictional world to readers. The paratext presented by Tutuola in *The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town*, comprises didactic literature. However, the objective of this study is to show how Amos Tutuola resorts to didactic and fiction in using the paratext to describe and display his imaginative universe of *The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town*. As for approaches, didacticism and literary approaches are of great help to achieve this study. Also, the analysis of the title of the novel as the element of the teaching strategy and subtitles also as the element of the teaching strategy sounds useful for its achievement too.

## II. The Title of the Novel: A Teaching Strategy

This section aims at showing how Amos Tutuola combines didactic and fiction through the title of the novel. In fact, the title of any book be it a magazine or an article for example, often appears as a key element and a key strategy of teaching the readers in advance about its content. According to Gerard Genette (1996, P.80) the title carries different functions which are: "Identification, description, designation, connotation and attraction".

In this respect, among Amos Tutuola's titles, "The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town" is one of his significant titles. This title is also a special one, because it is not too long. It is written as a phrase to connect the readers to the content of the book. It is also an interesting title and closely linked to the story depicted in the novel.

Didactically and literary speaking, in writing the "Witch-Herbalist" in his title, Amos Tutuola simply teaches in representing someone's profession, especially a woman profession because within the novel the Witch-Herbalist is called the "Omniscient, Omnipresent and Omniscient-Mother" or the Witch-Mother by the people and by her grandchildren (PP.141-143). The "Witch-Herbalist" also represents the Witch-Mother who is the ruler of the Remote Town. In other words, the "Witch-Herbalist" is used by Amos Tutuola in his title to refer to a Witch-Mother whose profession can be considered as a traditional and spiritual healer who "had never failed to solve any problem which was on earth" (P.22). She is presented as a powerful herbalist because she has a very powerful Omnipotence. This is why, in the novel the whole people is forced to worship the mother every morning and evening: "A special ceremony was even performed for her once a year as if she was God, Almighty" (P.141). In the same way, the "Witch-Herbalist" presented by Amos Tutuola in the title of his novel also represents an old traditional woman who is able to practice magical or witch-craft so as to give solutions to all social and spiritual problems.

As for the "Remote Town", represents one of the settings of the novel. The Remote Town also represents the "town of the Witch-Herbalist" (P.140). Meaning the town where the Witch-Mother lives. It is located: "in the remote part of the world and that it was very dangerous to go there because of the dangers and the Cruel Strange beings of the Jungles, forest, etc. through which one must travel to the town"(P.22). Amos Tutuola explains that: "To reach the town would take one up to six years or more. But it was not certain that one who set his or her foot on a journey to the Remote Town could reach there because of the dangers, etc. of the road" (P.22). Seriously, people are not fortunate to reach the Remote Town. There is a conviction that those who have tried to go to the Remote Town were not fortunate to back home, because the Witch-Mother was also able to detain people. It is said in the novel that "her witch-craft sometimes made her mad" (P.23). So, if one needs to go there, he must have courage and be brave.

It is obvious that in African literature, the titles of the novels are always significant, because they carry a particular message. So, in reading Amos Tutuola's title, people can have an idea about witch-craft, someone's profession and location. As it can be seen, in the coming section, it sounds right to analyze Amos Tutuola's subtitles as also elements of the teaching strategy, in order to know if they are linked to the title as well as the content.

### III. The Subtitles: Elements of the Teaching Strategy

It is useful, at the beginning to say that Amos Tutuola's novel *The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town* is a didactic novel. It contains at least thirty-six subtitles connected to each other. Those titles are also titles of chapters. From the first subtitle "The Rocky Town" to the fourth one "At Last I was Married to Lola" the author deals with the cultural and traditional life of the Rocky Town, the brave hunter's social occupation and his marriage to Lola which opens the story of the novel.

The fifth subtitle or chapter which is entitled "My Wife was Barren" is very interesting. It is also one of the short-chapters among others in the novel. It is about infertility which causes trouble in the couple life leading to terrible consequences. Indeed, after four years of marriage, the brave hunter of the Rocky Town and his beautiful wife, Lola, are still without a child. According to the brave hunter:

I was fed up with my wife, I was not happy at all because in the four years since I had married her she was not pregnant. My father, mother and father of my wife had tried all their efforts to make her pregnant by using almost all kinds of herbs, but all their efforts had failed. They consulted the spirit of the river but one did not render any help. So, when I saw that both of them were fed up, I began to think day and night as how to make her pregnant, because a woman or a man without even one issue would, in fact, have no respect or honor among his or her friends and neighbors, but he or she would live a sorrowful life throughout his or her life-time (P.21).

In this perspective, the decision is made by the brave hunter to look for a powerful herbalist "who would make the medicine which would not fail to make" his wife pregnant (P.21). One of the reasons leading to this decision is that the hunter thought that the cause of the infertility was in his side. To illustrate this point, the brave hunter said:

Having thought for nights and days as how to make my barren wife pregnant, at last it came to my mind that the cause was from my side because I was a "born and die baby" before, who had betrayed mothers and fathers of their property. Therefore, the repercussions of what I had done to the innocent mothers and fathers must come upon me however it might be (PP.21-22).

Having said so, the hunter decides to ask his father "where was the most powerful herbalist who would not fail to make" his wife pregnant (P.22). Then, the hunter's father says: "there was one who had never failed to do everything. He explains further that she was called "The Witch-Herbalist" and her town was called "The remote Town." My father said that her town was in the remote part of the world and that it was very dangerous to go there (...) (P.22). So, in chapter 6, which is entitled "My Preparation for My Journey", Tutuola explains how the brave hunter is going to prepare his first journey from the Rocky Town to the Remote Town. Accordingly, the hunter's reaction teaches: "I did not care about setting my feet on this long journey. I made up my mind to go and see at all costs, though to travel such a long journey at this time was greatly risky" (P.22).

Furthermore, in chapter 7, which is entitled "I left My Town For the Remote Town", Amos Tutuola describes the culture of the Rocky Town before someone's journey and the people's reaction vis-a-vis to the hunter's journey. So, the brave hunter already equipped with his juju does not waste time at all but stans up and starts his journey immediately. Truly, before leaving the Rocky Town he is going to face some ceremonies related to his

culture. Then, some people are praying for him. But his mother, wife and "many other were weeping bitterly as they were accompanying" him along to the outskirts of the town (P.27). "They did all this because they were afraid that if he failed to return it would be a great grief to them" (P.27). According to the hunter himself:

I did not bother for that at all. Instead, I was just going along as quickly as I could. But of course, I knew that they were weeping bitterly for the hardships, difficulties, dangers, bad spirits, ghosts and the wild jungle people who, they believed, I was going to meet on the way before reaching the Remote Town, if I was fortunate to reach there. But as for me, I had made up my mind ready to face whatever might disturb me on the way. (P.27).

It is like that he left his "Rocky Town that morning for the Remote Town of the Witch-herbalist", who "he believed, would help" him to make his barren wife pregnant" (P.27). In the same way, it is believed that people were not wrong when they were weeping and praying for this journey. Simply because from chapter 8 "The Brutal Ape" to chapter 20, "Road to the Remote Town" the author explains the difficulties and hardships that the brave hunter encounter before reaching "The Remote Town" in chapter 21. So, among the difficulties and hardships faced up by the hunter on his way to the remote town, people can quote in particular: hunger, lack of food, distance, physical and spiritual battles with spiritual wild men, animals and ghosts. As for the hunter:

After I had experienced much hardship, punishment, etc. in the wild jungles, etc. at last, I reached the town of the Witch-herbalist. As I began to travel along in this town, I noticed that it was very big, beautiful, and very clean and that it flourished with all the wealth of the world (P.141).

The hunter also notices that in the Remote Town all the people "were happy always because the Omniscient mother helped them to overcome all of their difficulties every time." The Witch-mother was the ruler of the Remote Town (P.141). Then, at the entrance before going in the Palace of the Witch-herbalist the hunter is stopped by the Porter. This can be illustrated by the hunter's words:

I came to the Palace of the Witch-mother and I went direct to the entrance, with the rags on my body and with dirty bushy beard. But when I came to the entrance, and as I wanted to pass through there to the Palace, the Porter hastily stopped me and then hastily walked back a bit with fear before he asked from me that what was my purpose to go to the Palace. This Porter asked this question from me with fear because he thought I was a mad man and, in fact, my appearance was so rough and fearful to see at this time that anyone who took me as a mad man was not mistaken and was not to be blamed at all. But I explained to him that I came from a very far town just to see the witch-mother to help me make my barren wife pregnant (P.141).

Truly, the Porter allows the hunter to go in when he realizes that his explanation is reasonable and sensible. "In the Palace of the Witch-herbalist" which is the 22<sup>nd</sup> chapter of the novel, Amos Tutuola describes what the hunter observes in the Palace as well as the impression that he has when meeting the Witch-mother. One of the significant observations that he makes is that:

She had various kinds of voices such as a huge voice, a light voice, a sharp voice, the voice of a baby, the voice of a girl, the voice of an old woman, the voice of a young man, the voice of an old man, the voice of a stammer, the voice of boldness, the voice of boom, the voice of a weeping person, the voice which was amusing and which was annoying, the voice like that of a ringing bell, the voice of various kinds of birds and beasts. And she spoke and understood all kinds of languages, of humans, beasts, birds, evil spirits, immortal beings, etc. Therefore, this Witch-herbalist had no interpreter who interpreted for

her the languages of the thousands of various kinds of people who were bringing their burdens to her (P.144).

In chapter 23, which is entitled "In the Hall of Assembly of the Mother" the author keeps on commenting on the things that the hunter was observing in the Palace and his sojourn in the Remote Town. It is also said that the "Hall of Assembly of the Mother" is the worshipping Hall or Hall of Assembly. In this regard, the brave hunter says:

The whole people of the town, and all the burdensome were worshipping every morning and evening. But if one of the burdensome people failed to attend the service even once during the period of one year that he or she would stay there, the mother would send him or her away from her town without helping him or her to take his or her burdens away (P.149).

To the hunter's surprise, he notices that in this Hall of Assembly of the Witch-mother, "there were more than one million big racks. Each of the racks contained thousands of large pigeon holes. It was in these pigeon-holes that different kinds of medicine were kept ready for use by the people of her Remote Town", and also for use by the whole people who brought their burdens to her. All of these miraculous medicines were prepared from herbs (P.149).

In a similar way, the hunter in the Hall also observes the way the Witch-mother is healing some burdensome people. For instance, the Skeleton Man in chapter 24, the Bald Lady in chapter 25, the Epileptic Man in chapter 26, the Woman with one ear in chapter 27 and the Man with Eight burdens in chapter 28, are all healed thanks to traditional medicines. This shows undoubtedly how the Witch-mother is powerful.

In chapter 29, "It is My Turn Now", Amos Tutuola explains the conversation that the hunter has with the Witch-mother and the way she prepares a soup that will make his barren wife pregnant. So, the soup is: "the cooked herbs, some pieces of meat and many other ingredients inside the cruse, and it was brim-full. The mouth of the cruse was carefully covered with its cover and then it was wrapped with a piece of white cloth so that the soup might not smell out into my nostrils (P.169). There is also one condition for this soup. The condition is viewed by the hunter in his words: "The covenanter warned me seriously that I must not eat from the soup, even I must not let the smell of it reach my nose. Thus, he warned me loudly and then he gave the cruse to me and I took it from him with happiness" (P.170).

In chapter 30, readers can observe the subtitle "On My Way Back to My Town" Amos Tutuola simply describes the way the brave hunter left the Remote Town with the soup for his Rocky Town. What is interesting is that, in chapter 31, he "Ate From the Soup on the Way". One of the reasons which leads the hunter to eat the soup is hunger during the journey. This can be illustrated by the hunter's words: "Hunger and giddiness forced me to eat from it on my way returning to my town" (P.180). So, it was because of hunger that his "first mind advised him to stop and eat from the soup which was in the cruse"(P.175). According to the hunter himself, when traveling he "did not see any village or town in order to stop there, to beg the inhabitants to give" him something to eat (P.174). This is why, he "put the cruse down, and without following the advice of his second mind" he "removed the lid of the cruse and" he ate from the soup to his entire satisfaction. In reality, after eating the soup, the hunter continued his journey with fear because he "never knew what would happen to" him later (P.175).

Furthermore, in chapter 32, entitled "I Returned To My Town At Last", Amos Tutuola deals with the arrival of the brave hunter in his Rocky Town and how the people received him in the town as well as the way his barren wife ate the remaining soup. According to the hunter:

In the presence of my father and mother, I told my wife to eat the remaining soup which was inside the cruse. Having eaten it, I told her that the Witch-herbalist or the Omniscient

mother of the Remote Town told me that she would conceive unfailingly within two months eating it. So, she was very happy when I told her that (P.177).

What is significant in this novel is that in chapter 33, both the wife and husband conceive:

In fact, as the Witch-herbalist (...) had told me that my barren wife would conceive within two Months of eating the soup, I was so much surprised that she conceived unfailingly within two Months of eating the wonderful soup. But my great sadness again was that I as her husband conceived as well. As the belly of my wife was swelling up every day, it was so my own belly was swelling out as well (P.179).

This quotation shows how the hunter has conceived like a woman. This situation brought confusion in the Rocky Town. In this regard, the hunter states:

The people of my town, as they loved me, my father, mother and my wife's father, were very happy to see my wife in this state. But they were confused at the same time when they saw my own belly which had swelled out like that of my wife. At first, they thought that it was sickness which had caused my belly to swell out. But as for myself, I knew quite well that it was pregnancy for I had eaten from the soup which had made my wife pregnant (P.180).

In matters of fact, when the hunter's and wife's families notice that the belly which had swelled out was pregnancy and not sickness, they became very sad, while the rest of the people in the town began to mockery to the hunter. So, they were saying with laughter: "this is the first time we see that the wife and husband have conceived together! But we shall wait for and see how the husband will deliver his own pregnancy"(P.180). This situation is very bad and complicate because it troubles the peace in the town. Accordingly, "the oldest people in the town said further that in order to bring peace to the town they would sacrifice" the hunter and his wife and all of their property to the god of the river within a few days (P.181). This was in relation to the tradition of the Rocky-Town. So, the tradition demands that if anyone has committed in the town, he or she must be sacrificed to the god of the river. So, both the wife and husband were sacrificed to the god of the river, because the husband has conceived like a wife. In this perspective, the hunter says:

Although my father, mother, my wife and her mother were weeping louder at this time, I assured them that the more I conquered the Crazy Removable-Headed Wild Man, the Abnormal Squatting Man, the Long-Breasted Woman of the Mountain, the Hideous Devil-Worshipper and his followers, etc. when I went to the Remote Town, so it was certain that I would conquer whomsoever I might meet in this my second journey. And I had a strong belief that I would return to the town safely with my wife, though there was none of the people who had been sacrificed to the god of the river who had returned. It was like that I assured my father, mother and my father-in-law this morning (P.183).

This quotation simply shows the hunter's courage and promise to his wonderful family. Then, in chapter 34, entitled "Under the River", Amos Tutuola describes the hunter's second journey (from the Rocky-Town to the god of the river), as well as the way the god and goddess of the river treated his swelled-up belly to normal. It is also important to say that most of the time the people who were sacrificed to the god of river were detained there. But this time, the god and goddess of the river said: "we shall not detain you and your wife but we will send both of you back to your town, though the children of the god and goddess must not be sacrificed to the god and goddess of the river"(P.191). They react in such a way because they notice that the brave hunter and his wife, Lola, are both the sons of the god and goddess of the river. According to the god of the river: "Thou shall not sacrifice the children of the god of the river to the god of river! It is forbidden! The people of your town were wrong to sacrifice both of you to us!" (P.189). This is why, they told the hunter and his wife that the people of your town must stop sacrificing human beings to us because we do not eat people. In this connection,



the goddess asked the hunter politely the following question: "will you please give us the two Removable-Heads? I promise, if you give them to us, we shall treat your swelled-up belly so that it becomes as normal as before." (PP.190-191). This was the only condition maintained by the god of river before treating his belly. It is also important to recall that the "two Removable-Heads were the hunter's trophies when he went to the Remote Town" (P.193). So, it was when the hunter accepted to give them the heads, "then with gladness the god started to treat" his swelled-up belly. According to the hunter:

The kind of the treatment was that he struck my belly three times with a heavy club of bone every morning. It was like that he did for many days until my pregnancy disappeared entirely. But a few days after my pregnancy had disappeared, my wife was delivered of a male child. So, with happiness, the god and goddess took great care of her and the baby for the period of three Months (PP.191-192).

After that, the god of the river decides to send the hunter and his wife together with their new baby and all the people who are sacrificed before backing to the Rocky Town. This return has been unbelievable by the people of the Rocky Town. This is why, all the people in the town have considered the brave hunter as a hero due to this return. In chapter 35 that we read: "People Thought That We Were Deads", the author describes the arrival of those sacrificed people to the Rocky Town. It is also useful to mention that the hunter's journeys were helped by his three spiritual partners namely: the first, second, and third minds. Those partners were his permanent advisors. Finally, in chapter 36, which is the last chapter of the novel, Amos Tutuola makes an evaluation between the three partners of the hunter. This evaluation aims at analyzing the right and wrong facts that they have committed on the way during the tow journeys. This resulted to the conclusion that the first mind "was sentenced to death for misleading and deserting" the hunter "when dangers were near (P.201).

#### IV. Conclusion

The analysis of didactic and fiction through the paratext in Amos Tutuola's *The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town*, results that, Tutuola allows readers to understand the problem of infertility in the couple life and its terrible impacts in the society, as well as how the barren people are in search for a child.

Through the paratext, Amos Tutuola resorts to some didactic techniques or teaching strategies by using the title and subtitles of the novel to present his fictional universe to readers. He largely succeeds to use the didactical dimension in presenting first: "The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town" as the title of the novel to help readers imagine in advance its content. Then, subtitles as elements of paratext have been also used so as to identify, describe, design, and connote his fictional world. In brief, Tutuola shows his didactic talents through the title and the subtitles of this novel to attract people learn the multifarious realities of his imaginative creation. Thus, the perspective dealing with the same concern will ponder over different names used by Tutuola to present his eloquent and fictional world of the remote town.

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